

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor,

It is always gratifying to learn that someone as well qualified as Dr Stevenson has read one's work carefully enough to criticize it and I will welcome any other exposures of flaws in my argument. Mrs Piper's abilities, or alleged abilities, have puzzled me for more than two decades, since I first obtained Xerox copies of the transcripts of sittings from the SPR at Adam and Eve Mews. It is possible that additional evidence about Mrs Piper and her sitters may come to light even at this late date; but perhaps the only way we shall get any closer to explaining the phenomena will be as a result of discoveries in neurology and the mechanisms of intelligence.

Dr Stevenson's claim that I "was wrong in asserting that the attribution of death to 'brain hemorrhage', in the absence of mention of contusions or skull fracture does not make sense as it stands" is supported by his citing the case of a student whose brain was found to have hemorrhaged, absent any open wounds. I don't think this contradicts what I said, for I did not say it was impossible for there to be hemorrhage without outward signs, I only said that there was no way the Medical Examiner, Dr Courwar, could have known of the hemorrhage when he arrived on the spot, absent contusions, etc. This is not my opinion. I am not a physician, and therefore, when I obtained the death certificate, I consulted a retired member of the New York City Medical Examiner's office, Dr Henry Siegel. Dr Siegel told me that, in 1892, the only way Dr Courwar, assuming there were no signs of skull fracture or contusions, could have known the brain had hemorrhaged would have been to open up the head. As he could not have performed such a procedure in the "cigar store", this gratuitous second cause of death is suspicious. In any case, this merely adds perhaps a bit of shading to the picture the certificate gives us of Pellew's death in circumstances that remained unknown to 'G.P.'

The other point Dr Stevenson makes is that Mrs Piper's memory "would not account for her (that is, the 'George Pelham' communicator) recognizing persons she had not known before when they were presented to her for the first time." I agree. The difficulty here is in knowing the circumstances under which these presentations occurred. Dr Hodgson seems to have devised a protocol for withholding identities of first-time sitters from Mrs Piper; but the record contains many egregious breaches, such as permitting the Perrys to make their initial visit to Mrs Piper unattended, and the social intercourse between Mrs Piper and the Perrys at Marlborough Street. I suppose in the absence of more precise information, all we can do is make reasonable guesses. I, despite an initial inclination to believe in Mrs Piper's powers, eventually arrived at a 'not proven' verdict. Dr Stevenson, and others, may reasonably think otherwise. I should like to add that I find Dr Stevenson's studies of reincarnation of great interest.

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